

Fall 2005 MEAP English Language Arts Assessment Design Grades 3-8

Introduction

The Fall 2005 MEAP English Language Arts (ELA) assessment has undergone changes that reflect the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), as well as the 2004 Michigan ELA Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs). This preview outlines the various considerations regarding these changes in the new ELA assessment so that local districts and teachers may better prepare for the upcoming ELA assessment.

The 2004 Grade Level Content Expectations

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that state assessments reflect state content standards. Since 2003, English language arts (ELA) MEAP assessments have reflected the ELA Content Standards and Benchmarks as described in the 1995 Michigan Curriculum Framework. The 1995 standards, however, were written to grade-level clusters and not to any particular grade level. As NCLB requires the annual assessment of ELA in grades three through eight by the 2005-06 school year, the Grade Level Content Expectations now serve as the basis for future ELA assessments at grades three through eight. Content validity of the ELA MEAP assessment for 2005-6 and beyond will be based upon the degree to which all assessment items measure GLCE content.

There are categories of GLCEs, however, that cannot be appropriately assessed at the state level. For example, some GLCEs require students to monitor their own learning (e.g., do substantial reading and writing on their own; independently self-monitor comprehension), or require ongoing monitoring by teachers in a classroom (e.g., produce and present a research project using a teacher-approved topic). These GLCEs should be monitored and assessed at the local district and classroom level. Other ELA statements (e.g., domain of speaking) cannot practically be assessed by the state at this time on an every-pupil basis. The 2005-6 assessments may include GLCE content from any of the grades preceding the one being assessed. Documents designating each GLCE as state-, district-, or classroom-assessable are currently available at: www.michigan.gov/meap.

Alignment between the GLCEs and the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Draft Reading Framework

In accordance with NCLB, the NAEP reading assessment will continue to be administered as the ongoing national indicator of what students know and can do. The 2009 Draft Framework for NAEP reading was developed based upon current scientific research in reading and is aligned to the requirements of the NCLB legislation. MEAP ELA assessment content should, therefore,

reflect commonalities between the GLCEs and the NAEP Framework. The NAEP Framework states that “text comprehension is influenced by readers’ ability to apply the essential components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge, fluency, and understanding of word meanings or vocabulary. Without these foundational skills, comprehension will not occur. By grade 4, when the NAEP reading assessment is first administered, students should have a well-developed understanding of [these components] ... for these reasons, NAEP has traditionally assessed students’ reading comprehension, not foundational skills.” For the same reasons, it was recommended that the MEAP reading assessment remain essentially an assessment of reading comprehension in English, with the understanding that foundational skills are needed for comprehension. Additionally, MEAP will ensure that each assessment form includes a mixture of narrative and informational text to support the GLCEs and to match the NAEP emphasis on literary and informational texts.

Administration Issues with ELA Thematic Connections

The 2003-2005 ELA assessments were connected across the extended writing prompt, two reading texts, and the optional listening portion by a common theme. The order of this model required a specific administration sequence that was deliberately intended to help students make connections from one part to the next. However, giving the assessments in a prescribed order has caused several problems:

Schools that mistakenly administered assessments out of order have had to give students at least a portion of the assessment over again in an emergency form. This has resulted in hundreds of students needing emergency assessment forms for which schools are charged, as well as considerable time spent by MEAP and contractor staff on phone calls, packing, and shipping of emergency forms alone.

Scheduling retests for students who were absent or late for a portion of a sequenced assessment has been difficult, especially in secondary schools and in districts with highly mobile populations.

Connecting all parts of an assessment has made it almost impossible to embed field-test items into operational tests. Embedded operational field tests help to ensure that field-test items are taken with the same care and attitude as operational items.

Connecting across all portions of an assessment made it difficult to include some text genres (e.g., functional text and “pure” informational text), as well as texts that are high quality, but do not fit a specific theme.

As a result of these considerations, it was recommended that entire forms for future ELA assessments should not revolve around a single theme. Most of the administration problems related to order of the assessment can be solved by disconnecting the writing, reading, and listening portions of the assessment. However, themes in reading remain a prominent feature of the 2004 GLCEs, and will continue to be considered as assessable content (e.g., connect personal knowledge, experience, and understanding of the world to themes and perspectives in text through oral and written responses).

Each assessment form will continue to contain at least one pairing of texts, as making connections within and across texts remains a feature of the 2004 GLCEs. Texts may be paired for the purpose of comparing and/or contrasting author's treatment of a topic or theme, as well as for purposes of comparing and/or contrasting different characteristics of text genres or text features. Additionally, the NAEP Reading Framework includes text pairings and cross-text items, and recommends continuing the use of intertextual passage sets to "approximate the authentic task of reading and comparing multiple texts."

Changes in the ELA Writing Assessment

The ELA writing assessment emphasizes the direct assessment of writing. Student responses are scored holistically for how well the writer conveys meaning to the reader and how well the response "hangs together" as a whole piece. The mechanics of writing (i.e., spelling, word usage, grammar, punctuation, capitalization) are assessed as part of the holistic scoring rubric. The ELA writing assessment has traditionally had one extended prompt that carries the entire weight of the writing score for elementary and middle schools. There was a need to strengthen the writing assessment with additional items, because the more items on an assessment, the more reliable or consistent scores are from one test administration to another. The emphasis of the ELA writing assessment will remain on the direct assessment of writing. At grades 3-8, the 2005 writing assessments will now include one extended response to a given prompt, one short constructed response to a given student writing sample, and five multiple-choice items for editing and revision of the same student writing sample.

As MEAP has begun to be used for individual monetary awards and increasingly for accountability purposes, students are feeling increasing pressure from adults to do well and are therefore taking longer than the estimated administration times gathered from pilot testing. In some cases, students may have mistakenly been instructed to focus their constructed and written responses on length versus quality. Allowing unlimited additional sheets for writing and unlimited time have translated unnecessarily into much lengthier administration time for only a portion of students and longer scoring time, which adds to scoring costs. Therefore, with the 2005 writing assessment, no additional sheets will be allowed for any constructed or extended responses. The number of sheets MEAP has allotted for all students within the answer document is more than needed for quality reading and writing responses.

Practical Considerations

The state budget is currently in crisis and may necessitate further cuts to the content and scope of MEAP. At the same time, state and federal laws require assessments that measure state content standards in the areas of reading/language arts and other content areas across a full range of achievement levels. MEAP assessments must be developed in such a way as to yield the best information and broadest content coverage for the least

expense. Multiple-choice items are cheaper to score than constructed responses and continue to make up the majority of MEAP items, but some content is best measured by constructed or written responses. For example, writing cannot be measured without asking students to produce a writing sample. In reading, the Response to the Reading Selections has been the best measure of higher or advanced reading skills, so it has been retained in the 2005 reading assessment design. However, it is recommended that quality responses can be well developed in half the number of pages previously allowed.

Grades 3-8 Fall 2005 English Language Arts Features

Presented below are specific features of the 2005 MEAP ELA Reading and Writing assessments.

Reading for Understanding

The MEAP reading assessment will directly assess comprehension of reading in English, with the understanding that foundational reading skills are necessary for comprehension. No dictionaries or other resource materials will be allowed on any reading or writing part of the assessment because students will be asked to independently answer questions about vocabulary in context, as well as some spelling, grammar, and word usage questions. As in the past, the MEAP reading assessment may not be read aloud to students as a standard assessment accommodation, as it is designed to measure reading comprehension in English.

Each assessment form will contain three to four reading texts of varying lengths (see table below). Selections will be authentic, intact works or excerpts of intact works that can stand alone with minimal background required. Texts will reflect quality writing. Texts will reflect appropriate grade level, as determined by the judgment of grade-level Content Advisory Committees (CAC), as well as other available, relevant information. Ranges of appropriate text length will vary by grade (see table below). All texts and items will be reviewed and approved for fairness, sensitivity and freedom from bias by Michigan educators who are trained to review for such issues.

The combination of all texts on any single assessment form should not exceed an approximate number of words per grade level. For several years, the approximate word limits for each grade have been 2,000 for grade four, 3,500 for grade seven, and 4,500 for high school. (Recent MEAP ELA assessments have been well below these word limits.) Texts within a form will vary in length from short to long.

Texts within each form will include:

A variety of genres, with at least one narrative or literary text and at least one informational or non-fiction text. Texts may come from literature or from “real-world” informational sources, such as newspapers or magazines. They may be classical or contemporary in nature. Every attempt should be made to include some functional or practical texts, as well as some poetry: a genre specifically included in the NAEP Framework for future assessments.

A variety of authors and characters representing diversity in culture, ethnicity, gender, age, and/or regional groups.

One pairing of connected texts; pairs may include two narratives, two informational texts or one narrative and one informational text.

One independent text.

One linking text for grades 4-8 to allow for measuring growth from one grade to the next. Third grade assessment forms do not include an extra linking text, but each third grade text will be used on a set of fourth grade assessment forms to link from third grade to fourth grade. Linking text items will count as part of individual student scores and summary scores.

Some assessment forms will include an embedded reading field-test section with one independent text or one pairing.

The table below outlines the features described above.

Operational Student Assessment Form for Reading
Grades 3-8

Grade	Number of Texts	Type of Texts	Maximum Approximate Text Length	Type and # Items Per Form
3	3	One narrative One informational One additional narrative or informational	2,100 total words per form	Approx. 8 m.c. per text + 5 m.c. cross-text + 1 c.r.
4	4 (includes one text linked to previous grade)	One narrative One informational Two additional narrative and/or informational	2,250	Approx. 8 m.c. per text + 5 m.c. cross-text + 8 linking items + 1 c.r.
5	"	"	2,500	"
6	"	"	2,800	"
7	"	"	3,150	"
8	"	"	3,500	"

The operational or "real" assessment is the portion that every student will take and that will be used to report scores for individuals and for groups. The reading assessment will include embedded field-test text selections and associated items that will not count in individual or group scores.

Each assessment form will include a combination of multiple-choice items and constructed-response items. Approximately 8 multiple-choice items will accompany each reading text. All assessment forms will include 3

vocabulary-in-context items measuring the Word Study domain of the GLCEs, and a varying number of items measuring the domains of Narrative Text, Independent Text, and Comprehension and Critical Standards (see table above). Each assessment form will include one written response to reading, with the majority of reading score coming from multiple-choice items. Reading response prompts will include direct questions at the elementary grades, and a mixture of direct questions and scenario questions at the middle school grades.

Writing

The 2005 MEAP writing assessment continues to assess writing in the English language. Unlike past assessments, no dictionaries or other resource materials will be allowed on any reading or writing part of the assessment because students will be asked to independently answer questions about vocabulary in context, as well as some spelling, grammar, and word usage questions. No scrap paper, graphic organizers, or any materials other than those specified in the MEAP administration directions may be used during the assessment. Please Note: The high school writing assessment will remain the same format as has been used since 2003 until the Michigan Merit Exam is fully implemented (i.e., one *Writing from Knowledge and Experience* prompt and one *Reporting and Reflecting* prompt).

New Fall 2005 Writing Assessment Features:

- Writing from Knowledge and Experience. Students will be given two pages maximum (front to back) for this response. This response must be written in one testing session and will be scored as *first draft writing*. The response will be scored using a 6-point rubric.
To reflect best practice in writing, all *Writing from Knowledge and Experience* prompts continue to allow students to choose their own format, genre, and approach to the prompt.
- Peer Response to a Student Writing Sample. Students will be allowed a one-page maximum for this response. Students are expected to write no more than one-half to one page. The response will be scored as *first draft writing* using a 4-pt. rubric.
The *Peer Response* requires students to answer a direct question about a given student writing sample and to support their response with examples and details from the student sample.
- Multiple-choice items. Students will be asked revision and editing questions that refer back to the same student writing sample that is used for the Peer Response. The Peer Response and the associated multiple-choice items must be administered in one testing session.
Some assessment forms will include an embedded writing field-test section. Each writing field-test section will consist of either one Writing from Knowledge and Experience prompt, or one student writing sample with a *Peer Response* and a set of associated multiple-choice items.

Forms

There will be 20 forms of the ELA assessment at every grade to enable MEAP to field test enough new items to construct assessments for fall 2006. The core of all 20 forms will be the same for all students and will be the portion of the test that is counted in individual and summary scores. In addition, each form will contain either reading or writing embedded field-test items and for grades 4-8, one reading linking text. Districts with more than one school will receive multiple forms, but each school will receive only one form of the assessment.

Differences in the 3rd Grade Assessment

Third grade assessments have been designed with some differences from all other grades. Third graders will write their responses in a machine-scannable assessment booklet, rather than transferring answers to an answer folder. Multiple-choice items for third graders have been written with only three answer choices, rather than four.